



Scoping Information



Proposed Vallenar Young-growth Project

What is the Forest Service proposing?

The Forest Service is proposing to harvest young-growth forests to provide timber for the Tongass National Forest Timber Sale Program. The proposed Vallenar Young-growth Project is located on National Forest System (NFS) land approximately 4 air miles west of Ketchikan, Alaska on the north end of Gravina Island, on the Ketchikan-Misty Fiords Ranger District, Tongass National Forest in southeast Alaska. The project area is located in Township 75 South, Range 89 East, Sections 12, 13, and 24; Township 75 South, Range 90 East, Sections 18, 19, and 30, Copper River Meridian.

Location and Existing Condition

The Vallenar Young-growth Project area (Project Area) encompasses about 886 acres within the Vallenar Creek watershed on the north end of Gravina Island (see Figure 1, Vicinity Map). About 299 acres of the project area (see Figure 2, Project Area Map) are on State of Alaska lands, and 587 acres are on National Forest System (NFS lands). The project area is located in Township 75 South, Range 89 East, Sections 12, 13, and 24; Township 75 South, Range 90 East, Sections 18, 19, and 30, Copper River Meridian.

Gravina Island has a variety of land uses and is in varying degrees of development. The eastern shoreline facing the city of Ketchikan contains an international airport, a seaplane base, ferry terminal, and industrial complex (all of which are under the jurisdiction of the Ketchikan Gateway Borough) and a few private residences. The remainder of the lands on the island are under the jurisdiction of either the Forest Service or the State of Alaska.

The project area is adjacent to, and bounded by the Gravina Roadless Area to the east, south, and west. The project is completely within Value Comparison Unit (VCU) 7610. The Land Use Designation (LUD) associated with this project is the Timber Production LUD (587 acres).

The forested young growth stands in the proposed project area are between 60 and 70 years old. The original stands were harvested in the 1950's. Currently the project area is mostly single storied, and composed of Sitka spruce, western hemlock, and red alder at varying densities and spatial arrangements.

The project area contains a mix of landforms from broad valleys, muskegs/wetlands, forested areas, and sub-alpine/alpine communities. As with much of southeast Alaska the position on the landscape and the hydrological characteristics define where landforms are present. Lower areas (bottom and muskegs) often contain wet deep soils that limit productivity, while forested slopes and ridges have better soil drainage and are typically more productive. Landslides are a common disturbance through southeast Alaska and are found throughout the project area. Steep hillsides, shallow unstable soil, and vegetation loss from windthrow or manmade events can effects the size and frequency of landslides. All project activities will be developed to minimize and limit the effects of treatments on landslide potential in the project area.

Riparian Management Areas (RMAs) are found in the project area. There is evidence of past harvest in these areas and currently many areas within the RMA differ in structure, species composition, and

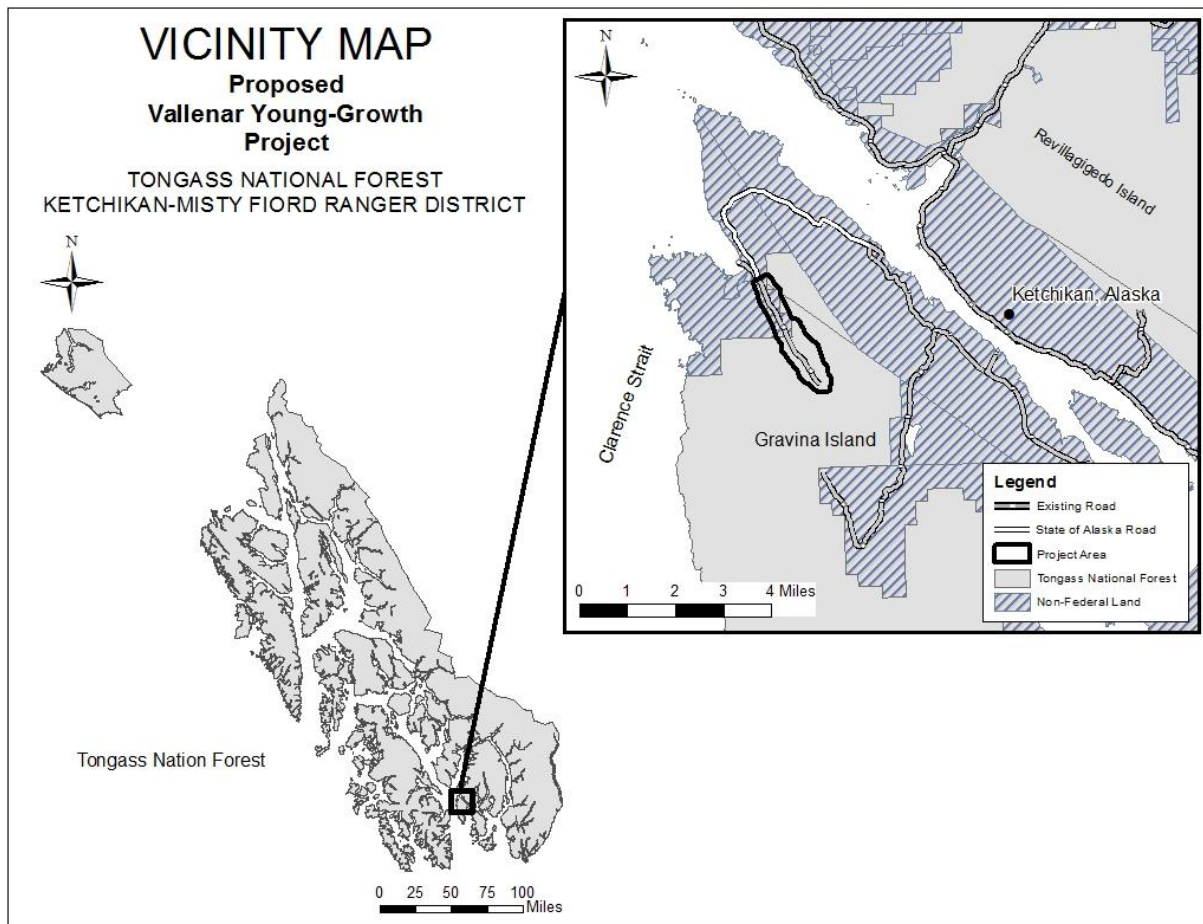


Figure 1. Vicinity map.

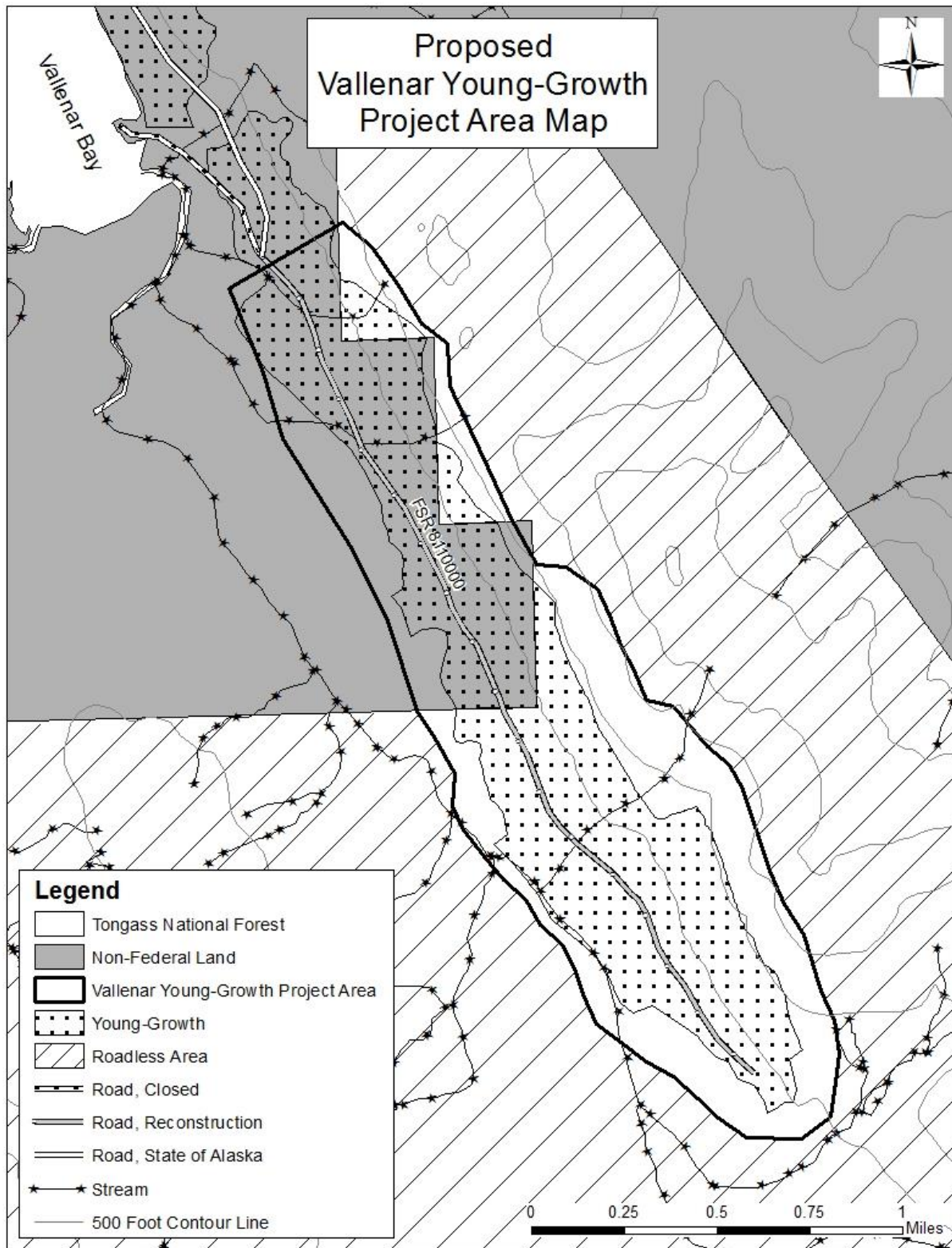


Figure 2. Project area map.

Need for Proposal

The need for the proposal is to develop young-growth opportunities that provide industry operators with the opportunity to acquire and work with this emerging forest product; to develop new markets; or to refine skills and equipment needed to economically harvest and process young-growth timber.

Numerous communities within the region have wood product businesses of varying capacities, each seeking forest products to support their business. In general, small businesses with limited capital investment resources are typical in the current southeast Alaska timber industry. These businesses operate on both salvage and green tree timber harvest, creating a wide range of natural resource employment opportunities for local entrepreneurs. Larger operations based in nearby communities also have a history of purchasing forest products from the project area.

Developing young-growth opportunities may provide industry operators with the opportunity to acquire and work with this emerging forest product; to develop new markets; or to refine skills and equipment needed to economically harvest and process young-growth timber.

Proposed Action

The Forest Service will analyze harvest and treatment opportunities within the 315 acre project area (see Figure 2, Project Area Map). Treatments could range from rotational harvest (clearcut) to single tree selection in areas outside the RMAs. Within the RMAs thinning (commercial and precommercial) could be used to help move these areas toward the desired condition. No new Forest Service road construction is proposed; however, road maintenance and road reconstruction on approximately 2.4 miles will be needed to access the project area. No harvest or road construction will occur within Roadless areas.

The project would utilize the State of Alaska road currently being constructed from the Gravina Island Industrial Complex, which includes a log transfer facility on the east side of the island to NFS road 8110000 near the project area. This State road is scheduled to be completed in 2017 and is being constructed to access timber harvest on the state lands adjacent to this project area. For information on the state proposal (Vallenar Bay Timber Sale), visit the Division of Forestry website at: <http://forestry.alaska.gov/timber/ketchikan#fiveyear>

Project implementation would begin in the spring of 2018.

Forest Plan Consistency

The 2016 Tongass Land and Resource Management Plan (2016 Forest Plan) includes young-growth management direction that reflects the need to transition away from old-growth timber harvesting toward a forest products industry that uses primarily young-growth timber, while maintaining a viable timber industry that provides jobs and opportunities for Southeast Alaska residents. The 2016 Forest Plan includes both forest-wide and young-growth direction including, but not limited to the following direction:

Forest-wide direction

Local and Regional Economies (2016 Forest Plan, Page 2-3, 5-13, 5-14)

Goal - Provide a diversity of opportunities for resource uses that contribute to the local and regional economies of Southeast Alaska

Objective - Support a wide range of natural resource employment opportunities within Southeast Alaska's communities.

Timber (2016 Forest Plan, Page 2-5)

Goal - Provide for the continuation of timber uses and resources by the timber industry and Alaska residents.

Objective - Manage young growth to provide commercial timber products and to maintain or improve habitat for wildlife and fish at the stand or landscape level.

Timber (2016 Forest Plan, Pp. 5-12 to 5-13)

O-TIM-01: Seeking to accelerate a transition to primarily young-growth harvest, offer an average of 46 MMBF annually in a combination of old growth and young growth. When young-growth offered is less than 41 MMBF, provide old growth to make up the difference and achieve the average annual projected timber sale quantity of 46 MMBF. After the transition, offer an average of 5 MMBF of old growth annually to support Southeast Alaska mills.

O-TIM-02: Seek to provide an economic timber supply sufficient to meet the annual market demand for Tongass National Forest timber, and the market demand for the planning cycle. The volume of young growth as part of the yearly offer will increase from an average of 9.2 MMBF annually in the first decade to an average of 25 MMBF annually in years 11-15 as the program nears full transition.

Young Growth Direction

(2016 Forest Plan, Pp. 5-2 to 5-9)

O-YG-01: During the 15 years after plan approval, the amount of young-growth offered would gradually increase to exceed 50 percent of the timber offered annually.

GL-YG-03: Create opportunities in young-growth management and the use of forest products in a manner that enhances the economic vitality of the region and the resilience of local communities.

GL-YG-04: Harvest of young-growth timber supports a variety of mill sizes and operators across the forest, including small and micro sales that support economic opportunities.

GL-YG-05: Make available a variety of potential forest products that support the development of an integrated industry based primarily upon young-growth timber harvest.

Riparian

DC-YG-RIP-01: Active management of young-growth stands that are suitable for timber production within RMAs supports a range of social, economic and ecological needs. These areas are managed to accelerate old-growth characteristics in order to improve riparian functions for soil, water, fish, wildlife and other resources (see Appendix D), while also providing a commercial timber byproduct.

O-YG-RIP-01: During the 15 years after plan approval, treat about 900 acres of young-growth in RMAs to provide a commercial timber byproduct.

S-YG-RIP-01: Young-growth harvest in RMAs outside of TTRA buffers would be allowed only during the first 15 years after Plan approval. The maximum size of any created opening for commercial timber harvest in the RMA must not exceed 10 acres and a maximum removal of up to 35 percent of the acres of the original harvested stand is allowed. Commercial thinning is limited to 33 percent of the stand's basal

area. A combination of the two treatments may be used, with no more than 35 percent of the total stand removed in either basal area and/or acres. TTRA and other administratively withdrawn areas do not count toward the stand's total acreage.

Preliminary Issues

The project interdisciplinary team (IDT) has internally scoped this proposed project to identify preliminary issues and management opportunities.

- Timber supply and economics
- Young-growth harvest in a Riparian Management Area (RMA)
- Hydrology and water quality

Environmental Analysis

The Forest Service has started preliminary work for an Environmental Assessment (EA) which will analyze the effects of the proposed project and include a no action alternative. The environmental analysis will consider public scoping comments as well as those provided by the project IDT.

Responsible Official

The Responsible Official for the decision is Earl Stewart, Forest Supervisor for the Tongass National Forest.

Decisions to be Made

After conducting and reviewing the environmental analysis, including public involvement and resource specialists' input, the Responsible Official will make the following decisions based on the environmental analysis:

1. Whether the proposed project will proceed as proposed, as modified to address issues, or not at all;
2. What specific resource protection or mitigation measures or monitoring should be implemented as part of the project; and
3. Whether the project would have a significant impact requiring an Environmental Impact Statement.

Scoping

Scoping is the first step of public participation for the proposed Vallenar Young-Growth Project planning effort and begins the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) process. Public comments provided during scoping are used by the IDT to identify and address additional potential issues, concerns, and opportunities associated with the proposed project in the environmental analysis.

In 2016 and 2017, the Ketchikan Misty Fiords Ranger District hosted three open house meetings where the public was invited to discuss and identify possible management opportunities within the Northwest Revilla Island landscape and in other areas on the District. During these open house meetings, this proposal was discussed as an opportunity for young-growth timber management on the District. The Forest Service also engaged stakeholders (State of Alaska Division of Forestry and Alaska Forest Association) to discuss further.

Objections and Commenting

The proposed Vallenar Young-growth Project is subject to objection (36 CFR 218 subparts A and B). Only those who submit timely and specific written comments regarding the proposed project during any designated opportunity for public comment may file an objection (36 CFR 218.5). Opportunity for public comment on an EA includes during scoping or any other instance where the responsible official seeks written comments. Individuals and entities wishing to be eligible to object must meet the provisions in 36 CFR 218 Subparts A and B.

How to Comment

Your input and ideas are important in designing, analyzing and implementing the Vallenar Young-growth Project and will be helpful to the project interdisciplinary team identify issues and design a proposed action and possible alternatives to address issues and concerns.

Please email your comments to **comments-alaska-tongass-ketchikan-mistyfiord@fs.fed.us** and include *Vallenar Young-growth Project* in the subject line. Written comments can also be submitted by facsimile to 907-225-8738, mailed to Ketchikan-Misty Fiords Ranger District, Attn: Vallenar Young-Growth Project, 3031 Tongass Avenue, Ketchikan, AK 99901, or hand delivered to the Ketchikan-Misty Fiords Ranger District office on Monday-Friday between 8 a.m. and 4:30 p.m., except for Federal holidays. For more information contact Damien Zona, Team Leader at (907) 225-4126.

It is the responsibility of individual or entity to submit comments by the close of the comment period. The time period for the opportunity to comment shall not be extended. Specific written comments should include the following:

1. Name and current physical mailing address (a telephone number is optional);
2. Your organization name if commenting as a representative;
3. The project title, *Vallenar Young-growth Project*.

An electronic username is insufficient for identification of an individual or entity. An email address alone is not sufficient.

Written, facsimile, hand delivered and electronic comments received, will be accepted for 30 days after publication of the legal notice in the *Ketchikan Daily News*, the newspaper of record for this project. All information including the names and addresses of those who comment, will be considered part of the public record on this proposal and will be available for inspection.

We look forward to your participation. Your input and ideas will help ensure a successful project.

Additional Information

Additional information about proposed activities may be found on the Tongass website at:

<https://www.fs.usda.gov/projects/tongass/landmanagement/projects>

Questions and comments about this project may also be addressed to:

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